

The Amateur Winemaker

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FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Then Bob proposed:

"A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!"

Which all the family re-echoed.

"God bless us everyone!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all. -

Charles Dickens (A Christmas Carol).



CHRISTMAS

I'm old-fashioned and sentimental enough still to enjoy reading regularly, once a year in this pre-Christmas period, what always stands for me as a little gem of Dickens, his "Christmas Carol." Sometimes I think that this must surely be (with his Dingley Dell episodes) the literature above all else that enshrines all the best of Christmas, indeed, it probably created the modern conception of a family Christmas. How Dickens loved this time of the year, and how brilliantly he evokes its atmosphere in every line! How he revels in his descriptions of the succulent goose upon which the Cratchits are feasting, and of the punch in which they drink their toasts. Dickens was obviously so much a lover of a good table and good drink, however humble, that I feel sure that had he lived today he would have been among the first to enjoy making and drinking his own wines and beers. And *what* descriptions he would have written of a tasting session in a fellow-winemaker's house!

All of which thoughts were prompted by this year's re-reading of "A Christmas Carol," and we cannot do better than to echo Bob Cratchit's toast and say, glass in hand, to all our readers: "A Merry Christmas to us all ... God bless us."



WHERE THE CIRCLES ARE

In February, 1959, older readers will remember, we published a map showing the location of winemakers' Circles in this country; there were then 44. We thought it would be interesting now that the "A.W." has been in existence exactly six years, to repeat this idea, and thanks to Miss Gillian Pearks, who prepared this month's cover, we can now do so. Even we were staggered at the changes the intervening five years have wrought. There are no less than 176 known Circles, and so thick are they that it was impossible in some areas to squeeze all the place-names on to the map. They include seven in Canada. There can be no movement that has grown at such a truly astonishing rate, and it is also true that early prophets of doom who predicted that any winemaking circle must soon peter out because of the limitations of the subject were quite wrong. What they overlooked was that winemaking circles, as we run them, are much, much more than mere classes of instruction; they have everywhere been found to be also power stations of sociability and friendship, providing opportunities for enjoyment and for the formation of true friendships under the most favourable conditions. Truly, we built better than we knew. Today the winemaking movement is spreading if anything faster than ever, the process of Circle formation is snowballing. Even in the fortnight since our cover map was prepared, two new Circles have been formed, so it is already out of date. The map and the list on P. 439 are as accurate as we have been able to make them, but undoubtedly we have omitted some, or made other slips, and we would welcome any corrections, so that our list can be brought up to date before the National Conference.

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GUILD OF JUDGES

"How does one become a judge?" This is one of the questions which crops up most regularly in our postbag, and until now there has been no really satisfactory answer, since there have been no facilities for qualifying. Hitherto the only way in which one has been able to qualify as a judge is to volunteer to act as a judge's steward at the National, and gain top-flight experience in that way. Then, if one's palate and judgment prove acceptable, there is a chance that one may eventually be invited to join the judges' panel. This is still the position, and an experience of top-level stewarding is always likely to be a pre-requisite for the would-be judge (incidentally, stewards are required for next year's National: apply to Mr. S. W. Andrews, 6 Tamworth Road, Hertford). But things are likely to undergo a big change with the formation, reported in this issue, of a "Guild of Judges," which will devise an examination which would-be judges can take in order to qualify; we wager there will be no lack of aspirants. The formation of this Guild is likely to prove the biggest step forward for our hobby since the first Circle was launched.



STEWARDS WANTED

At every National Conference and Show so far the smooth running has been hampered by a distinct shortage of willing hands. Far, far more people are required to help with all sorts of small but essential and quite interesting jobs-erecting staging, taking in entries, labelling, acting as liaison between various sections, stewarding the doors, stewarding the hall, collecting tickets, taking charge of luncheon arrangements, keeping the judges and their stewards supplied with essentials-all sorts of tasks. This year for the Bournemouth Conference, the Show Manager, Mr. L. Gilbertson, of 43 Morgan Street, Pontypridd, Glamorgan, hopes to enroll a much larger band of helpers. They will not all be required all the time, but in particular plenty will be required at the Town Hall, Bournemouth, on Thursday, April 16th (2.30-9 p.m.), Friday, 17th (all day), and Saturday, 18th (the main day of the Conference, all day). If you intend to be at Bournemouth, and if you can spare any time at all to help, do please write to Mr. Gilbertson, and say plainly when you will be available, then he can work out his roster. *Many* willing hands are wanted, so do please help if you can. Can local Circles please assist as well?